

Cannon Beach considers emergency manager

City manager hopes position would improve continuity

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

Cannon Beach may hire a full-time emergency manager as soon as July.

The position is part of a larger effort driven by City Manager Bruce St. Denis to restructure the way the city approaches emergency planning.

The city contracts emergency planning to consultant Stacy Burr. But St. Denis told the City Council Tuesday, April 10, the part-time consulting model is not delivering the results the city needs to be prepared.

“We are not where a lot of people think we are,” he said.

After reviewing practices for the past four months, St. Denis is looking to retool the Emergency Management Team, as well as shift more of the focus to recovery plans. The emergency manager would conduct training,



NANCY MCCARTHY

Cannon Beach may hire an emergency manager to conduct training, follow up with logistics like cache supplies and coordinate preparation policies.

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St. Denis said the cost would be about \$40,000 more than what the city is spending on consulting and a part-time emergency management position that was never filled this year.

Burr could not be reached for comment about the potential change.

“Unless you have someone working all the time to focus

on this, it doesn’t happen. I think it will upgrade the emergency management and resiliency of the city,” St. Denis said. “It’s a relatively small investment with tremendous payback.”

While Cannon Beach has the largest Community Emergency Response Team and Medical Reserve Corps in Clatsop County, St. Denis said a lack of continuity in training and planning has slowed progress the city could

be making. He used the example of a tabletop exercise held last month aimed at teaching hotels and vacation rentals to prepare for a tsunami.

St. Denis took issue with how only a few from the hospitality industry attended, how short the exercise was and how there appeared to be no arrangement for following up or reaching beyond this group of people.

Red flags were also raised when a tsunami watch prompted by an Alaska earthquake was issued earlier this year. The protocol for how the city was supposed to respond to a tsunami watch, versus a tsunami warning, was not clear, St. Denis said.

“I think sometimes we assume we’re ready (for an emergency) because we’ve talked about it once before,” he said.

St. Denis said there are deficits in recovery and how the city plans for lower-impact scenarios like wind storms or small-to-medium sized tsunamis. Most recent efforts have centered around evacuating people for a worst-case scenario.

If approved by the city’s budget committee, St. Denis

would want the emergency manager to focus more on contracts that would help the town recover after a disaster — like clearing and disposing debris from the roadways.

“I think we can have a better, clearer message ... re-evaluate some assumptions made in the past,” he said. “Right now we tell everyone to walk to South Wind. Well, that’s not likely to be built for a long time. But maybe if we look at the most recent (tsunami run-up projections) from (the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries), maybe we could find some new locations for shelters for smaller events and prepare for that.”

St. Denis draws his approach from his time as a city manager in Florida, where he was responsible for recovery efforts after hurricanes.

“No one prepares for a Category 5 hurricane — you can’t. But even if there is a Category 5, unless you get hit right at landfall, you’ll be facing a Category 4, 3 or 2 and you can prepare for those,” he said.

In general, city councilors were supportive of the idea of an emergency manager

but questioned how it fit with other budget priorities like affordable housing.

“We’re actually making some progress with emergency preparedness,” City Councilor George Vetter said. “The reason we’re not making progress with affordable housing is because we’re not putting away any money toward it.”

But Les Wierson, an emergency preparedness committee member, and Lila Wickham, the head of the Medical Reserve Corps, both spoke about how the continuity of a full-time emergency manager would be helpful to community preparedness.

“I still don’t know my redundant communication plan. I still don’t know where I’ll be treating injured people,” Wickham said. “I think this would be helpful.”

The City Council gave St. Denis to go-ahead to tentatively start looking for job candidates, but will ultimately decide whether the position is created during budget committee hearings next month.

“I think with \$40,000 more we’ll be getting a bang for our buck,” St. Denis said.

Change will affect about 30 mixed-use buildings

Pot from Page 1A

“Instead of having the city make that decision, we should let the resident decide whether or not they want to live above a pot shop.”

The City Council also decided to restrict a marijuana store from operating in “a purely residential building.” While uncommon, there are a few single-family homes in the commercial zone that could technically operate a pot store without this language.

This change is what caused City Councilor George Vetter to cast the single “no” vote. He argued prohibiting marijuana businesses from residential buildings in the commercial zone was “spot zoning” and a fruitless attempt to keep marijuana out of residential areas. Property owners could easily convert their property to be fully commercial by taking out any “cooking facilities” in the home — the standard the city uses to assess whether a property is residential or not, Vetter said.

“The problem I’m seeing is we aren’t saying you can’t have a commercial operation, but really just that you can’t have a marijuana commercial operation,” Vetter said. “We’re not accomplishing much in my opinion. It’s the same way we lost those residents downtown. If it comes to the point where someone really wants it they can turn it commercial, and now it’s mixed use and our ordinance has no effect.”

David Frei, a representative from the Ecola Square Homeowners Association, also opposed the ordinance. In written testimony, Frei asked the city to accept more

public comment before making the decision.

The homeowners association, which has long opposed Five Zero Trees moving in across Hemlock Street, asserts the issue with the mixed-use aspect of the ordinance only involved Five Zero Trees, where the property owners, Bruce and Max Ritchie, did not disclose the three residences in the building when filling out the land use compatibility statement.

“The approval should not have been given, had that been known. But then that led to the evictions of the residents and the loss of three residences in affordable-challenged Cannon Beach,” Frei wrote.

The change will affect about 30 mixed-use buildings in Cannon Beach. Oregon Inc. is lining up to be Cannon Beach’s second marijuana retailer on Hemlock Street, where the clothing store Purple Moon used to operate, but has yet to apply for a business license.

Construction expected to begin June 1

Campus from Page 1A

Commissioners considered plans for elementary school play areas, a track and athletic practice field, a secondary access drive, stormwater treatment, expanded parking areas and bus access.

The district also identified areas that could be used for a future water storage reservoir and pump station.

Planning commissioners and school district officials agreed to negotiate a proportional payment when cost details are available.

A memorandum of understanding between the city and the district will detail the district’s financial responsibility for improvements.

Road impacts

Commissioner Bill Carpenter sought a commitment from the school district to repair roads that could be subject to damage during the construction process.

According to a revised construction management plan, more than 11,000 heavy trucks will be used in construction. This represents the damage done by the equip-

ment of nearly 75 million passenger car trips on Spruce Drive during the 14-month period of heavy construction, Carpenter said.

Repairs to Spruce Drive could come from Seaside’s urban renewal funds, school district attorney Kelly Hosaini said. “We are committed to doing what is necessary in respect to Spruce. The district is not planning to walk away from that. I think the district and staff will be able to work something out.”

Conditional OK

Commissioners unanimously voted to grant the permit with the condition that any major changes be brought before the commission or staff.

Major changes identified

by the staff or the district will be brought to the Planning Commission for review.

After the meeting, Noelle Idehara of Hoffman Construction Co., said the commission’s decision allows the district to move forward. “We still need to work through our permitting for the site work piece of this, but this will allow us to start moving forward,” she said.

Idehara said construction is expected to begin with erosion control measures.

“You’ll see some fencing going up, then you’ll see mobilization of getting equipment on the site,” she said. “Then you’ll see stump removal and chip grinding for those erosion control measures. Then we start earthmoving.”



R.J. MARX

Noelle Idehara of Hoffman Construction Co. and Seaside School District Superintendent Dr. Sheila Roley after receiving conditional approval for construction of the district’s new campus.

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